

# TaxSlayer Gator Bowl: Notre Dame vs. South Carolina

Sunday, December 4, 2022

Jacksonville, Florida, USA

TIAA Bank Field

## Marcus Freeman

## Shane Beamer

### Press Conference

NELSON BRADSHAW: Good evening, everyone. I'm Nelson Bradshaw. I'm this year's chairman of the TaxSlayer Gator Bowl.

We as part of the trustees, TaxSlayer, and the TaxSlayer Gator Bowl Green Jacket and staff would like to welcome everyone to this evening's press conference.

We're ecstatic to host the No. 21 ranked Notre Dame Fighting Irish against the No. 19th ranked South Carolina Gamecocks in the 78th TaxSlayer Gator Bowl.

These teams last faced off in 1984 where South Carolina edged out a victory. But let's go ahead and get right to it, and we'll start with the visiting team, Notre Dame.

Joining us this evening on behalf of Notre Dame is the Dick Corbett Head Coach Marcus Freeman.

Coach Freeman, we look forward to hosting the Notre Dame administration team and fans to Jacksonville later this month. I do want to mention a couple of highlights for your season. Notre Dame is making its fourth appearance in the Gator Bowl, with a victory in 1976 over Penn State and losses to Georgia Tech in 1998 and North Carolina State in 2002.

This is Notre Dame's sixth consecutive bowl selection and 11th in the last 12 seasons, and now I'll turn it over to Coach Freeman to make a few remarks.

Coach?

MARCUS FREEMAN: Well, thank you. I can't tell you how excited we are to play in the TaxSlayer Gator Bowl and to play a great opponent in South Carolina.



We're all college football fans, as am I, and to see what they've done to finish off their season has been remarkable. So, you know, on behalf of our football program, our players, I'm sure the fans, we're excited to be able to play South Carolina on December 30th.

NELSON BRADSHAW: Great. Thank you, Coach Freeman.

Now, we'll go to South Carolina, and joining us this evening on behalf of South Carolina is head Coach Shane Beamer. Coach Beamer, we also look forward to having the South Carolina administration team and fans in Jacksonville later this month.

A few highlights from your season: This is South Carolina's fifth appearance in the TaxSlayer Gator Bowl. The last appearance was in 1987 against LSU. Then notably South Carolina played in the very first TaxSlayer Gator Bowl on January 1, 1946.

Then South Carolina obviously finished this season with victories over Tennessee and Clemson. So great finish. Looking for you, Coach Beamer, to make a few remarks on behalf of South Carolina.

SHANE BEAMER: Thank you for that, Nelson. Like Coach Freeman said, we're extremely excited to be in the TaxSlayer Gator Bowl. Our fans, I know, are ecstatic about this opportunity. Our athletic director was just telling me about the ticket sales already and just before I got on the head of our tickets texted me and said these ticket sales are insane. So we're really excited about a fantastic bowl.

Obviously a lot of those ticket sales have to do with who we're playing, and we're playing a great team like Notre Dame. A ton of respect for what they've done this year. Both of us started off 1-2, if I'm not mistaken, and we've both rebounded to get to where we are right now.

So two good teams and a ton of respect for Coach Freeman and his staff and the job they've done this year as well. Excited to get down there as well.



I know Greg McGarity and I -- Greg was at Georgia as the athletic director when I was an assistant coach there, so I know any event that he is a part of and the rest of the TaxSlayer Gator Bowl staff will be fantastic. I was telling our local media earlier, my dad's second bowl game ever as a head football coach was in the Gator Bowl, but it was actually the year that it was played in Gainesville, when the stadium was being built there in Jacksonville. Played a freshman quarterback at Tennessee by the name of Peyton Manning, who ended up being okay.

My second year as a head coach, I'm coaching in the Gator Bowl, and couldn't be more excited about the opportunity.

NELSON BRADSHAW: Thank you, Greg. Now I'll turn it over to Katie, who will coordinate questions from the media.

**Q. This question is for Coach Freeman and also for Coach Beamer: First for Coach Freeman, congratulations on your season. What was the pinnacle of your season when you knew that he had to turn this thing around because you guys were up and down throughout the year, and then you had some great wins the rest of the season?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Well, for us it was just to focus on trying to improve. After starting off the season 0-2, being a first-year head coach, we're trying to do whatever it takes to win, but then you start building on momentum and improving.

We beat a great North Carolina team, and Syracuse I think was undefeated at that time, maybe one loss. Then we had a defeat to Stanford. It was the ability for our leaders to help us regroup. The coaching staff did a great job of setting the plan and the standards, but our leaders kind of really took the lead and helped us improve. You know, we had some big wins over Clemson and a couple of other teams towards the end of the season, but it was tough loss to USC.

We talked about it being a bumpy road, and it wasn't how we foresaw it as the season started, but the ability to improve week after week after wins and losses was the challenge that I had as the head coach for this team.

Again, to finish this season off with the opportunity to play South Carolina, we're extremely excited.

**Q. Same question to Coach Beamer: I know you started off 1-2. When did you know that you had a great team that could turn this thing around and make it into a positive season?**

SHANE BEAMER: Yeah, didn't start off the way we wanted, losing to Georgia and Arkansas in the first three weeks. We weren't competitive against Georgia, but our guys kept working and kept getting better. We managed to win three games in a row I guess after the Georgia game, if I'm not mistaken -- or two in a row, whatever it was. Then we went up to Kentucky. That was a pivotal point for us.

South Carolina hadn't won in Lexington in I believe it was ten years, and we went up there against a nationally-ranked Kentucky team that was coming off a tough loss to Ole Miss. To win that night and the way that we did was huge for us. Then just like Coach Freeman said, we certainly had some setbacks as the year went on, but our guys always continued to work and responded. The way we finished was fantastic the last two games, but a lot of that to me goes back to that night against Kentucky.

**Q. Coach Beamer, you mentioned your dad's game in Gainesville, but correct me if I'm wrong, but weren't you on the roster for the '97 Gator Bowl?**

SHANE BEAMER: Yeah, let's not talk about that one. We got the heck beat out of us by North Carolina.

**Q. I did notice that, but I wondered if you had any particular memories of the experience that week because kind of the culture of the Gator Bowl hasn't changed a whole heck of a lot from what Rick Catlett passed on to Greg McGarity, and people talk about the experience that they had, win or lose. I wonder if you remember it that way when you were a player?**

SHANE BEAMER: Yeah, what a great trip it was. Stands out. You have to go back to when my dad took over at Virginia Tech in '87. He didn't go to a bowl game for his first six years or seven years. '93 was the first bowl game. They played in the Independence Bowl, but then the next year when they got invited to the Gator Bowl, I just remember what a big, big, big deal it was. Like, we're going to the Gator Bowl, guys.

That goes back and speaks to the tradition of the Gator Bowl. Then '97, remember it was a fantastic experience. I think we stayed at the Marriott over there on Salisbury Road, if I'm not mistaken. It was one of the team hotels and had a good team other than we ran into a really, really good North Carolina team that day.

Then it seems like wherever I was coaching, my schedule always worked out where I was able to go see my dad coach in other Gator Bowls. I was there in 2000 when Virginia Tech beat Clemson. I was there when Virginia Tech played Louisville in the Gator Bowl. Virginia Tech

played Florida State one year; I wasn't there for that one. But the Gator Bowl was always one of my dad's favorites because of the way things are done there in Jacksonville, and I'm sure it's no different now with Greg and his staff heading things up. I know it will be a great time.

Hopefully a better performance by my team than the one back in 1997.

**Q. Obviously with Drew deciding to enter the transfer portal late last week, he started ten games for you guys. Was presumably going to start this game for you. What are your quarterback plans for this game after his announcement?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: We still have three quarterbacks on the roster: You have Tyler Buchner, Steve Angeli, and Ron Powlus. All have been practicing the past two days that we practiced and could see any of the three play. They'll all be ready to play.

**Q. Then just with Drew, what was that conversation like, and how are you going to look back on this season and what he did for you guys?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Drew was tremendous. You know, you hate to see him leave and enter the portal, but as I told him in our meeting, you know, what he has done for our program, the ability for him to step the end of Week 2 and throughout the season, he did a tremendous job.

You know, we had a conversation this week, myself and Drew, as well as many of the other players that we have on our team in terms of our intentions, my intentions into certain positions, look for transfer, and I'm always looking for ways to enhance our roster.

I always want to be up front and honest, and I was with Drew and told him that we would possibly look at taking a transfer quarterback. I did not want him to leave, but he made the decision to enter the portal, and I definitely respect his decision.

**Q. Coach, just following up on Tyler's question, is Tyler Buchner 100% healthy now, or is he projected to get there? Then the other part of the question is, have you talked to your team about opt-outs, who is all going to be available for you in this game?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: We've had individual meetings with a lot of our players. Really just talked to them about taking it a little bit at a time to kind of figure out their plans, you know, for transfer portal, for playing in the bowl game and other decisions they have to make. So we've had individual meetings all week. That's one of the good things

about having these four days of a dead period to meet with your guys and talk about the roster and make plans as a head coach.

As for your question to Tyler, yeah, he is full go. He has practiced the past two days in practice.

**Q. If I can follow up, if I may, Marcus, what do you like about playing an SEC team, especially one like South Carolina that just knocked off two top ten teams, both for finishing off this season and developing toward next year?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: I think any competitor wants to play great teams. What you know is, again, I haven't watched a lot of South Carolina, but I think they played Tennessee the day we played Boston College. I was able to see maybe the last quarter, and I remember watching a couple of plays with my kids and saying, wow, you know, this team is explosive. They're extremely talented.

I haven't had a chance to really watch the Clemson game, but for them to beat a common opponent like Clemson, that's an extremely talented team that just won the ACC yesterday. You know you are facing an extremely talented opponent.

Again, we're competitors. We want that. We want a chance to play a great opponent to see how good this football program is.

**Q. Marcus, wanted to ask another injury question here on Cam Hart. I know he said in his statement when he was returning for a fifth year he wouldn't play in a bowl. I'm curious what he is dealing with there that's going to have him knocked out for a little bit.**

MARCUS FREEMAN: He had a shoulder injury that he is going to end up having surgery on. He will be out obviously for the bowl game.

**Q. Marcus, specifically on Michael Mayer, Isaiah Foskey, what have they told you what their plans are for the bowl game?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Not yet. I met with both of them, and we had a plan to sit out some guys as recovery for these last two practices of development and trying to kind of really focusing on the younger guys and developing the younger guys on our team.

So I told both of those guys kind of just take the week and take a couple of days to really think about what they want to do for their future, and we will discuss it sometime this week. Probably early this week.

**Q. I wanted to ask for both coaches, how do you handle when you need to have decisions from players in terms of their availability for the bowl? When do you want to know if guys are committed to playing or not? Do you have firm deadlines that each of you have set for that?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: We haven't set a firm date, deadline, but we told them, listen, we know as far as getting into the portal, the portal opens on Monday, so we need to kind of have an idea of what the future plans are for certain guys.

But, you know, for our guys that are deciding if they're going to play or opt out for the NFL Draft, they understand the sooner the better. I just didn't want them to have to rush into a decision.

Kind of just take a week. We just got done playing a 12-game season. Take a week. Talk amongst the people they trust, their coaches, their families, and probably be ready to make a decision here Monday. Early this week.

SHANE BEAMER: I would echo what Marcus said. Same. Had individual meetings with a ton of our guys last week. We have exams starting tomorrow here at South Carolina, so our guys will be in exams this week. Coaches are out recruiting. So very similar. Guys have decisions to make about the NFL, the bowl game, things like that.

My meetings last week were positive are with all my guys from that standpoint. One of them, like Coach Freeman said, to be able to decompress a little bit from the season, and we want to help them make a sound decision. So I haven't given them a deadline or anything, but obviously the sooner the better, so we can go ahead and start planning.

**Q. I know you haven't talked a lot -- or watched a lot of South Carolina, but Spencer Rattler is probably coming off his two best games of the season. What are your impressions of him and the football you have been able to watch and what kind of challenge is he going to be?**

MARCUS FREEMAN: Just peeking, I did take a couple minutes to peek at just the offense versus Clemson and then obviously watched a little bit of the Tennessee game. He is special.

Their offense is explosive. I haven't watched much of their defense yet, but they have an explosive offense, and it all starts with their quarterback.

Spencer is an extremely talented individual. I've seen him extend some plays with his legs, the ability to throw the ball into tight spaces, make good decisions. He is a talented quarterback.

We have faced some talented quarterbacks this season, and he will be just as good as any of those talented quarterbacks we've faced. It will be a huge challenge, but there's playmakers all across the field.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you both, Coach Beamer, Coach Freeman. We look forward to having you in Jacksonville at the end of the month.

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